

CITY OF HOPE ORANGE COUNTY NEARS COMPLETION • OC SOCCER CLUB WINS CHAMPIONSHIP • UCI GALLERIES PRESENT 2 NEW SHOWS

IRVINE WEEKLY

DECEMBER 3, 2021 VOL. 4 • NO. 2

SHABU + HOTPOT

A BLUEPRINT OF HOW TO ENJOY THREE NEW IRVINE RESTAURANTS OPENING SOON.



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LEADING EDGE OF CANCER TREATMENT

CITY OF HOPE ORANGE COUNTY CANCER CENTER NEARING COMPLETION IN IRVINE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Boasting gorgeous, unobstructed views of Irvine from each of its four floors, the Lennar Foundation Cancer Center at City of Hope Orange County in Irvine has entered the final phase of construction on its \$1 billion, 197,000 square foot outpatient cancer care and research facility. Located at FivePoint's Great Park, the City of Hope Orange County is expected to be completed in 2022.

During a recent tour of the soon-to-be-completed facility, Annette Walker, president of City of Hope Orange County, explained that City of Hope's newest facility will bring more than 1,000 physicians and cancer researchers into Orange County.

Following the theme of City of Hope's campus in Duarte, which spans more than 120 acres, the campus at City of Hope Orange County will feature walkable gardens, an aspect of development that Walker explained was extremely important to patients and their families.

"If you haven't been to City of Hope Duarte, they have 125 acres and beautiful gardens, and those beautiful gardens are part of what contributes to the healing environment of City of Hope," she said. "Not only have we gone to great lengths to make sure the interior of the building is very comfortable, but it's important that patients be able to take a

walk with their families, get a little sun, and sit in the shade."

With the addition of City of Hope's 11-acre campus at the Great Park, along with the UCI Medical Center in Irvine, Walker said City of Hope is proud to be a part of Orange County's continuously expanding medical infrastructure and is optimistic to bring more state-of-the-art cancer care to local residents.

"Orange County is very blessed, but what surprised us is that so many patients were coming to us from Orange County, and that 20% were leaving the county. We're answering the community's needs," she said. "There's no other organization in the county that's 100% focused on cancer – we're bound and determined to beat it."

During the site walkthrough tour, guests were given a glimpse at the construction of some of City of Hope's state-of-the-art cancer treatment technology, including three LINAC rooms that are designed with cinder blocks infused with steel aggregate, used to shield radiation from the outside.

LINAC, also known as linear accelerators, are used in radiation treatment for different types of cancers. In terms of construction, Walker said the construction on the LINAC rooms began in September 2020, and is still being completed.

Hero Lennar Foundation Cancer Center Monument



"I never saw one built, and now I have a whole new appreciation for what a LINAC is and how we protect our patients," Walker said. "To consider the breadth of research our facilities are going to have – 400 cancer specialists, 800 scientists and researchers that are trying to find the cures for cancers and we have 700 clinical trials – it's a magnitude in intellectual capital that's extraordinary. When you talk about the leading edge of cancer treatment, it's going to be right here."

As the tour ended in what will eventually be infusion rooms at the top of City of Hope Orange County, Walker pointed to different handwritten messages of hope from guests and the workers that currently occupy the facility.

This has become a welcome tradition within the bones of City of Hope, Walker explained. After a construction worker named Adam wrote a message to his late mother with a sharpie marker on a soon-to-be painted panel of drywall, City of Hope Orange County took notice.

"To my mother Lorraine Reyes, who

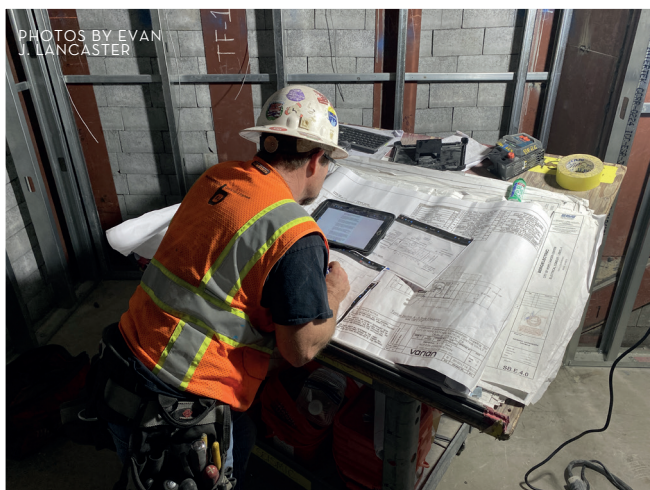
lost the battle with lung cancer on 9/25/2010, I dedicate this project to you and to everyone who lost the battle. May all those who enter the building find strength, courage and hope. May this building be filled with love, compassion and healing. This is a start of something new, may God bless all those who walk through these doors. I love and miss you mom every single day, my heart, sweat and tears are all in this project."

"We love what [Adam] said so much, we cut it out of the drywall and we framed it and it will hang downstairs when the building is complete," Walker explained. "Anyone we've toured, we allowed them to write on the wall. Some of the stuff is covered up now – but just know if you write something, it's always, always going to be there – 50 years from now," she said.

Dr. Amrita Krishnan, a multiple myeloma researcher with City of Hope for more than two decades, said that many of her patients in Orange County are forced to travel outside of the county for cancer treatment. However, with the addition to the Lennar Foundation Cancer Center at City of Hope Orange County, it will bring extensive care to local residents.

"I've worked for City of Hope for 25 years – this is beyond my wildest dream of what we could happen," Krishnan said. "To get the innovation that is part of City of Hope is so exciting. All we do is cancer, and deliver the future of cancer care."

With nearly a dozen acres reserved for City of Hope Orange County, Walker explained that once the cancer treatment and research center is complete, City of Hope has plans to build an adjoining specialty hospital that is expected to be completed in 2025.



PHOTOS BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Different seasons call for different cuisines. Earlier this year, TRADE Marketplace added a couple of new eateries to its collection of restaurants and retail shops. *Irvine Weekly* dutifully reported on those eateries, Champion's Curry and SmörBurgers, which were both highly satisfying! And while curry dishes and burgers are also great when the year gets colder, TRADE's newest additions, OlyvOyl and Presotea, provide diners with even more eclectic options for satiating their winter palates. Naturally, we had to taste for ourselves.

OlyvOyl is a family-owned restaurant serving up authentic Mediterranean cuisine. Their recipes and cooking techniques were handed down by their ancestors to perfect the taste of the Levantine cuisine, dishes from the Levant region of the Middle East including Turkey, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel and Egypt. When we dropped by the restaurant to sample some of their items, we had a chance to speak with OlyvOyl's owner, Basma Kaoud, who shared with us a bit about the company's history in Irvine.

"When we started OlyvOyl, we started it back in 2016," Kaoud told us. "Our first location, which is on Jeffrey, is the main location, which we started as a flatbreads place where we just do pizza flatbreads in a Mediterranean style [the TRADE location does not currently sell the flatbreads]. Then, throughout the year, the customers wanted more than just pizzas, especially for Mediterranean cuisine; they wanted more rice and meat and stuff like that. So we had a plan [that by] the end of the year, we'd start up this new menu where we introduced the kebabs and the rice and everything."

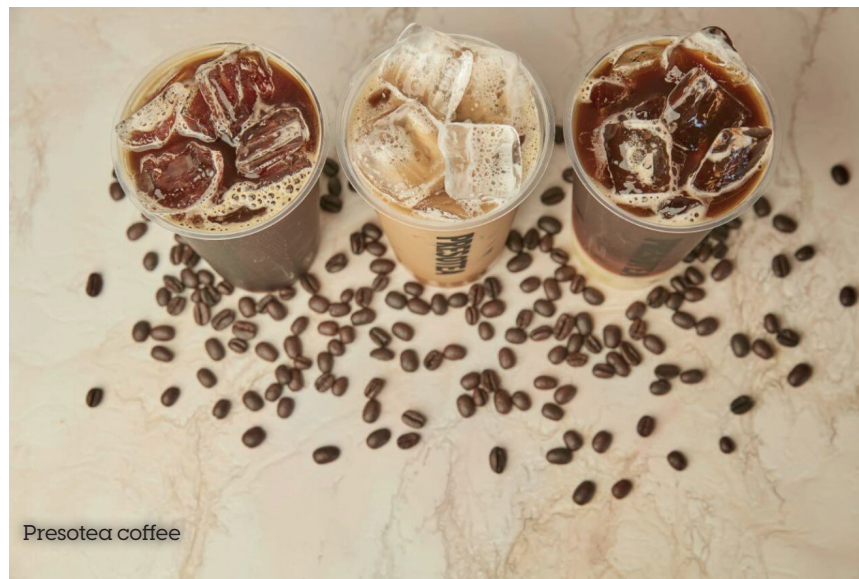
Kaoud went on to point out how the Mediterranean cuisine at OlyvOyl is distinct from other Mediterranean restaurants. "Looking at the market, there are not many authentic – truly authentic – [places]," she elaborated. "The very popular ones out there are either Persian cuisine, Greek, Lebanese, but nothing that's Syrian / Palestinian."

In addition to a halal menu of traditional dishes from those regions and the particular varieties of spices, seeds and herbs which are used in the preparation of the food, Kaoud emphasized the freshness of all of the food served at OlyvOyl.

"About 95% of our food is [freshly] homemade," she said. "Five percent is the fries or the kibbeh, which is our meatballs.

OLYVOYL AND PRESOTEA JOIN TRADE

BY SCOTT FEINBLATT



Presotea coffee

It's easier to just buy them ready from someone who does them homemade. Again, we have to find a homemade place. So, these are the only two items that are frozen. Everything else is fresh, made to order, prepared that day or the night before. But there is nothing that is frozen pre-cooked, or that sits in preservatives."

As Kaoud had her staff prepare me a large plate with a variety of menu items, she pointed out how much she cared for the food and service at her restaurants. "What I wouldn't eat and wouldn't feed my kids, I wouldn't offer to the public," she said. "And that's how I train my staff. I'm like, 'Look at the plate before you give it out. If you wouldn't like it, if it doesn't look good enough for you to eat it, don't give it out; fix it and then give it out.' So it's not about money and becoming rich. It's about really offering something good to the community."

Next, I was handed a fully loaded plate. It included samples of the beef, lamb and chicken over rice. There was a side of hummus, a salad, and a piece of fresh pita bread. As if that wasn't enough, I was also given a chicken shawarma, at which point I conceded that my diet would have to start the next day. The lamb was very good. The

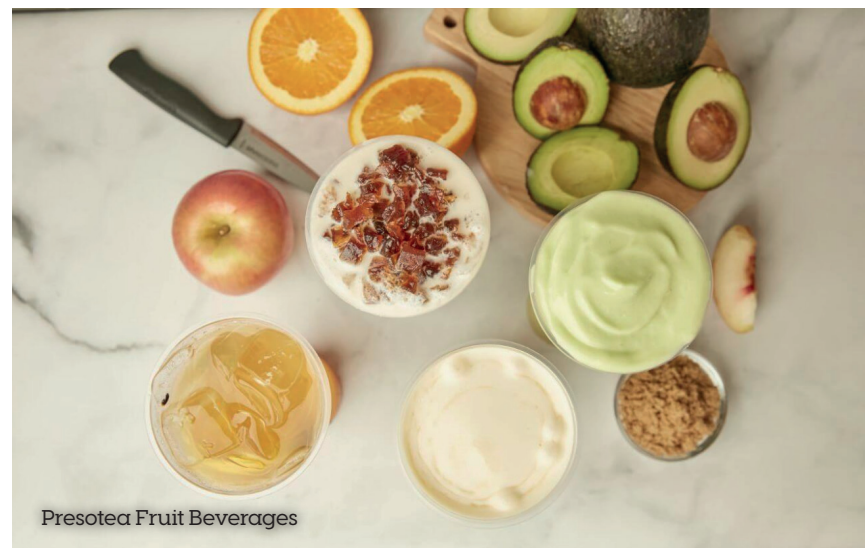
seasonings were not overpowering and gave the meat a delectable taste. The chicken and the beef were also good. I enjoyed them the most when used with the delicious, fresh pita to make little sandwiches, to which I also applied some of the hummus. The hummus, itself, was very rich with nuanced flavoring; it definitely stands out from any store-bought hummus I've had. Also, the side salad with fresh, crunchy croutons was excellent. Finally, I lifted the shawarma for the final tasting of the menu.

I was pretty stuffed by this point, but the chicken shawarma was so juicy and flavorful that it made my body forget I was full. It was most delicious!

Now, the job being half done, I still had to get a boba fix over at Presotea. After a breather, I gathered my remaining strength and waddled over to the window, where I was greeted by Tina Ferrante, who opened this franchise with her husband, Vito. The story of Presotea began in Taiwan, in 2005, when the company founders wanted to discover a new way to enhance the flavor of traditional tea drinks. After a year of trial and error, Presotea opened its doors as the world's first technological tea brewing company. Rather than brewing in bulk, they invented a high-end, espresso-style brewing technology that maintains the tea's optimal flair and sweetness. Their tea experience begins at the farm, where they select high-quality tea from their Taiwanese plantations which have mastered the craft of tea growing for generations. With their high-pressure infusion technology and fresh tea leaves grown and picked from their very own tea gardens, they bring the freshness of the farm to every cup.

While Presotea currently has several locations in Southern California, this is the first in Irvine. Ferrante, who has a business background, explained how she and her husband came to choose this company from the many other boba tea companies.

"My husband and I love Boba drinks," she said. "We've been drinking them for 20 years, and we've always wanted to open [a boba location]. But then, when we started our search a couple of years ago, we toured a lot of different fran-



Presotea Fruit Beverages

FOOD



Presotea Tea and Coffee Beverages

chises and we were just kind of shocked to see that a lot of places brewed tea in a large batch, and then they were stored in the fridge. And I remember there was this one franchise that told us that it could be stored in the fridge for up to five days. That was shocking to us. I don't want to drink that, and I don't want to serve customers that. So that's

why we got really diligent about trying to find a place that offered healthier, fresh options. And then we found this place where every single cup is brewed fresh."

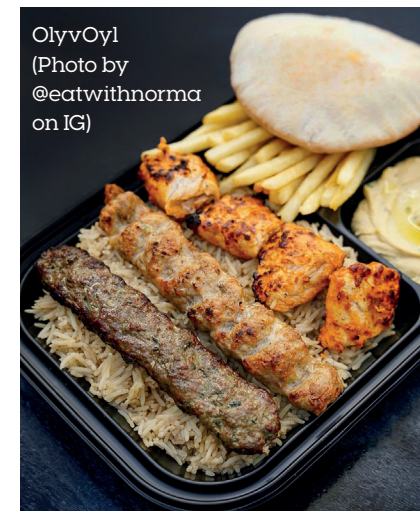
She noted her commitment to the product by adding, "Even though it's more expensive in terms of the equipment, the machines, and also the time that it

takes to brew every individual cup fresh – so it's hot to start out with, and then we have to go through the process of cooling it down – everything takes longer, but it's fresh."

Given that I was still pretty stuffed from my experience over at OlyvOyl, I knew I couldn't handle one of the heavier choices, like a smoothie or a Thai tea. Furthermore, it would have been silly to waste an opportunity to taste one of Presotea's proper tea drinks; I ordered an iced oolong tea with boba. Not being an iced tea kind of a guy normally, I didn't know how to navigate the various options of sweetness that seasoned iced tea drinkers can choose from, so I deferred to my host's recommendation. In short, it was delicious. I very much enjoyed the sweetness level, the richness of the oolong flavoring, and the boba was fresh as well, of course. Despite being stuffed, I was easily able to enjoy my refreshing boba beverage. Guests can select from a wide range of teas listed on their menu, including: Jasmine Green, Oolong, Genmaicha, Roasted Hojicha, A-Li Shan, Ceylon, and dozens more.

In the near future, TRADE Marketplace will add Yomie Yogurt (a high-concept, global, handmade yogurt brand) and Tuk Tuk (a Thai street food concept with authentic Thailand dishes) to their dining area, but even now, diners have plenty of diverse and high-quality options waiting for them!

TRADE Marketplace is located at 2222 Michelson Drive, in Irvine. For more information, visit www.tradefoodhall.com



OlyvOyl
(Photo by @eatwithnorma on IG)



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FOOD

IRVINE'S SHABU AND HOTPOT CRAZE

THREE NEW HOTPOT RESTAURANTS ARE OPENING SOON. HERE'S HOW TO ENJOY THEM!

BY AUDREY FONG

Marbled meat, bundles of fresh vegetables, steaming broth, and dozens of fish ball and tofu varieties – there's so much to love about hotpot and shabu, especially during the cooler months. Lucky for Irvine, three new hotpot restaurants are opening soon – Dai Mei Hot Pot, Nice to Meet You Hotpot and Shancheng Lameizi.

While hotpot and shabu have been enjoyed in China and Japan for centuries, the craze for both seems to have increased exponentially in Irvine just over the past few years. Hotpot and shabu have many similarities, but they are not exactly the same. For new diners, here is a quick breakdown of the two and how to enjoy them.

Hotpot, for the most part, is Chinese, although there are Korean options, while shabu is Japanese. Both of them feature boiling soups at the center of a table or a counter that diners use to cook their meals. Typically, hotpot places will have tables with special vats embedded in the center of the table, while shabu places will have a table with a stovetop and will place a bowl of soup on top of that. Both allow guests to cook their meals in front of them in the soup. Since you cook the food yourself, both

are social dining experiences that last longer than your typical meal, similar to how KBBQ is a social experience.

Below is a beginner's guide to help you find the right hotpot or shabu spot for you and how to enjoy your meal.

Choose the type of hotpot or shabu spot that works for you. Typically, all spots fall under one of four categories: a la carte, all you can eat, combo, and pre-selected bowls. Below are breakdowns of each category and which restaurants in Irvine offer this option.

At a la carte spots, you order everything from meat, vegetables, noodles and sides individually, giving you the most control over your meals. While this allows guests to enjoy a wide variety of dishes, these spots are often the most expensive because the dishes rack up quickly.

Try this at: Chengdu Laozao Hotpot and Haidilao

All you can eat spots feature a wide variety of options that you can help yourself to. Typically, you order plates of meat that the waiter will bring by, while everything else is at a counter for you to choose from. Some restaurants include dishes like fried chicken, japchae, sushi and fried rice in the cost.

Try this at: All That Shabu, Dada Shabu



Shabu Buffet, House of Shabu Shabu, and Oishi Shabu Shabu

Combo meals usually have you select a meat and then come with a veggie platter and a bowl of rice. You typically get to choose one noodle option as well such as ramen, udon or vermicelli.

Try this at: dPot, Miyabi, and Mokkoji

If you want an easier option, where everything is decided for you, a pre-selected bowl spot is the best option. The bowl comes with a selection of different meats, veggies and other toppings precooked. If you dine in, it'll come in a hotpot bowl that keeps the soup boiling as you eat.

Try this at: Boiling Point, Haidilao and Peng Huo

Once, you've chosen a spot, the first step at any restaurant is to choose your broth. This broth will be used to cook everything you order, so be sure to pick something you won't tire of. Typical broths for shabu include miso, tonkatsu, sukiyaki and a vegetarian option. Hotpot restaurants typically have a wider variety of broths to choose from including miso, tonkatsu, Sichuan spicy, tomato, kimchi and pork bone.

The next step is to choose your meat. This step doesn't matter at all-you-can-eat spots, since you can try a little of everything and it's included in the price, or at a la carte restaurants, since you can order multiple meats. But at combo and pre-selected bowls restaurants, this step is important because that meat will make up the core of your meal.

The fun part is that all these spots let you cook your meal right in front of you. Start by adding the items that'll take longer to cook in the broth. These can be thick vegetables like carrots, mushrooms, and broccoli or cubes of tofu and dumplings. Once you've got those out of the way, all you have to do is swoosh your meat and leafy vegetables in the broth to cook it. The meat is cut very thinly, meaning that usually, two to three swooshes through the broth is enough to cook it. Before you eat anything, be sure to blow on it to cool it off.

Most places will offer sauces on the side for you to dip your items in. The most common sauces are goma, a creamy sesame sauce that pairs well with meat, and ponzu, a citrusy soy sauce made with yuzu that goes great with vegetables. Make these sauces yours by adding grated garlic, chili oil, diced cilantro, or green onion slices. Depending on the restaurant, they will either provide the sauce at your table or have a sauce bar where you can mix your own.

Whether you opt for hot pot or shabu, these restaurants are great options for staying warm during the cooler months or for dinner with friends. And if it's your first time trying this type of dining, consider checking out multiple of these spots to get a better feeling for hotpot and shabu.



WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS

ORANGE COUNTY SOCCER CLUB CLAIMS 2021 USL CHAMPIONSHIP TITLE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

After celebrating two consecutive sudden-death victories at home in Irvine, Orange County Soccer Club traveled to the East Coast to face off against the Tampa Bay Rowdies in the 2021 USL Championship Final on Saturday, Nov. 28, at Al Lang Stadium in St. Petersburg, Florida.

OCSC would emerge victorious, claiming a 3-1 victory, and the first USL title in the OCSC's 11-year history.

Despite trailing in possession time early on, OCSC's Patrick Rakovsky saved a penalty kick from Tampa Bay forward Sebastian Guenzatti, clearing it from play. The save would ultimately become a huge shift in momentum for Orange County.

Within the last 20 minutes of the first half, Orange County took advantage of the absence of Evan Louro, Tampa Bay's goalkeeper, who was recently named USL Goalkeeper of the Year, and scored multiple times – 25' and 38' Ronaldo Damus, and 45' Mikko Kuningas.

By half time, Orange County had a dominating 3-0 lead.

In the second half, OCSC's defense was tight, but Rakovsky did allow one goal about 10 minutes into the half.

After the game, Rakovsky seemed unphased by the goal scored against OCSC, and focused more on the saved penalty kick from the first half. Rakovsky said he knew it was a pivotal moment, but said it may have been luck over skill.

"It was pure luck. I looked forward, then to the right side and then he hit it at the perfect height for me, not too high, not too low," Rakovsky said. "I think for sure it was a key moment in the game."

OCSC Head Coach Richard Chaplow agreed with



his goalkeeper, adding that OCSC is fortunate to have Rakovsky's skill in front of the net.

"You always need a little luck and certainly we created it," Chaplow said. "Our back line, they were animals out there tonight and we expect that from them. He's been a huge figure for us in the streak we are in. He's kept many clean sheets and does it surprise me when he makes these saves? Absolutely not. We see them every day and that's the quality keeper he is. I just wish we didn't have to see as many [saves] tonight."

The win in the USL 2021 championship match was the ninth consecutive win for Orange County Soccer Club and sixth playoff appearance in eight years.

Speaking to Irvine Weekly prior to the USL Finals Match, Oliver Wyss, OCSC president and general manager, said he sees the club's success off the field translating on the field more frequently.

"You have to build a club history and a club culture that young players, when they start playing AYSO soccer or club soccer – boys and girls – want to be part of our first team and build that real pathway where they

Michael Orozco
With the Cup



are proud of it," he said. "Of course we want to compete for championships, and have a team that not only produces top young players but also competes at the highest level in the game."

With two goals scored in the 2021 USL Finals, OCSC's Ronald Damus was named Most Valuable Player. While this is his first MVP award, Damus won a championship with North Texas SC in 2019. With the help of an interpreter, Damus explained that he is proud to be a two-time champion in Orange County.

"I feel good because the dream was to win a championship with Orange County, but I feel much better now because I won the MVP," he said. "The way I see it in life is day by day. I was a champion in Texas, but when I came here the goal was the same and now I'm a champion in Orange County."



PHOTOS COURTESY
OC SOCCER CLUB



ART

DECEMBER 3, 2021 | IRVINEWEEKLY.COM

CONFLICT INTO POETRY, DISORIENTATION INTO ART

UC IRVINE PRESENTS TWO SHOWS THAT VENERATE SOME OF OUR DEEPEST TRAUMAS.

BY LIZ GOLDNER

Two complementary exhibitions, *Revolution Everywhere* and *The Messiah Triangle* at UC Irvine galleries, delve into the disorientation, sense of impending doom and ultimately hope in the Middle East and beyond. Juli Carson, UCI professor of art, curator and gallery director, explains, "The projects we commission provoke intelligent debate on the subject of art in its most expansive poetic and political definition."

Revolution Everywhere: Thresholds of Resistance features large-scale film and photographic installations by three artists who have lived among revolutions in Beirut, Lebanon and Hong Kong. The exhibition was inspired by the simultaneous uprisings in Beirut and Hong Kong in 2019 – events that activists, writers and artists in both locales recognized and embraced. These

protests were discussed in an interview/dialogue with participants from Lebanon and Hong Kong in June 2020. That interview became the genesis of the title, *Revolution Everywhere*.

This exhibition is comprised of three solo installations, referencing the recent revolutions. In each installation, a millennial artist's work is inspired by what Carson refers to as a "political primal scene," or a childhood/young adult memory of a traumatizing political event. Participants are Panos Arahamian, an artist/filmmaker who grew up in Lebanon, witnessing the Armenian Genocide there, and later learned about an Israeli Airforce bombing of a U.N. shelter with civilians; Simon Liu, an artist/filmmaker who lived in Hong Kong with a British mother and Cantonese father during political turmoil, who often revisits his country of origin to witness



Michael Dahhan (*The Messiah Triangle*)

its deleterious changes; and Heather O'Brien, an artist/filmmaker whose work is inspired by watching devastating reports of the Lebanon Civil War (1975-1989) on TV during her childhood in Colorado.

Carson explains, "I asked all three artists to expand upon their primal scenes, discussing how they came to their aesthetic strategies – ones driven by their politics – that have culminated in their first major body of work... They all chose to represent the revolutions in which they find themselves embedded, from a position of 'aesthetic distance.' Hence the poetic turn towards rather than away from the cataclysmic events of their respective cultural landscapes."

Arahamian explores his country's history in his work and this exhibition, con-

tributing idealized images of Beirut. His closeup video of an intricate silkworm farm references the once flourishing silk industry in Lebanon, which today experiences ongoing devastation. His "Odorless Blue Flowers Awake Prematurely" depicts flowers blooming within the residue of the August 4, 2020 blast in Beirut.

Liu is archiving what he refers to as "the rapidly evolving psychogeography of his place of origin" through alternative documentary forms, abstract diary films, multi-channel video installations and 16mm projection performances. Some of his images depict the aftermath of Hong Kong streets following protests, with refuse such as shoes and masks left behind, along with celebrations including fireworks.



Simon Liu (*Revolution Everywhere*)

O'Brien's installation includes photos of Beirut street and domestic scenes; a few with clothes hanging on lines, another of broad windows looking out at a bucolic courtyard, and others of attractive living spaces with potted plants and the sun streaming in. Some of her accompanying wall text, often contrasting with her images, describes her immersion in the tumultuous events there. She wrote: "The sound of sweeping glass permeates the neighborhood. The port is on fire again. WhatsApp messages fly back and forth. Do we leave the windows open or closed this time? How do we escape the flying shards of glass? I close the shutters and hold Liam close. One month since the explosion. One month postpartum. The hardest and most delicate month of my life. No one prepares you for the strength this process requires, or the depths it will take you. All while seeing a city you love die before your eyes."

Carson elucidates that the three artists' installations are often politically oriented, adding that they allude to the hope for a better world and to healing, as they artfully repurpose dystopia into beauty.

The film *The Messiah Triangle* is even more dramatic and foreboding. The short black and white movie is based on the life of Juliano Mer-Khamis, an actor and activist who grew up in Israel with an anti-Zionist Jewish Socialist mother and a Palestinian Christian Communist father. He was assassinated in the West

Panos Arahamian (Revolution Everywhere)



Bank in 2011 near the theater he founded. The event was dismaying to those who knew about him and especially about his efforts to achieve solidarity and coexistence among Palestinians and Israelis.

The Messiah Triangle's message, according to its Israeli American filmmaker Michael Moshe Dahan, is to expose the toxic relationship among Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The film's didactics further explain that the three religions' "messianic impulses have resulted in history's greatest and most violent conflicts as both religious

and nationalist wars."

The conceptual film features three actors auditioning to play the movie roles that Mer-Khamis once played, rendering the project as a film within a film. The mood is dark with the actors appearing suspicious and menacing, as they portray people who have been traumatized by violent political events. They also interact defensively with the film's confrontational female director, Yael.

The movie's ominous scenes, along with the superlative acting, draw the viewer in. Further, immersing oneself in

the movie may instill the hope that the cast will transform its somber mood, or that the auditioning actors will resolve their issues with the director. Or as the film's producers wrote, "Can one man's identity not only embody conflicts that are older than history, but perhaps, in some version of the future, also help resolve them?"

The overall effect of *The Messiah Triangle* is to alert viewers to the gravity of seemingly unsolvable issues among people of the world's three major religions. And as with *Revolution Everywhere*, the project is artful, morphing the Israeli/Palestinian legacies of trauma and national identity into a work of visual and literary poetry.

The art enthusiast may question how political activism and disorientation can inspire art. Carson, previously Professor of Art History and Curating at the American University of Beirut in 2018-2019, anticipated protests while living in that city. With those traumatizing events as stimuli, she talks adamantly about creating art out of the devastation of failed nation-states and forced Diaspora. She asserts that art has curative powers, especially during tumultuous times, such as the era we are living in. Or as a Buddhist philosopher wrote, "We must not live to destroy. We have the spiritual power to create peace and happiness."

Revolution Everywhere is on view at UCI's Contemporary Arts Center and Room Gallery. *The Messiah Triangle* is on view at UCI's University Art Gallery. Both are on view through December 11; Tue.-Sat., noon-6 p.m.; gallery@uci.edu, uag.arts.uci.edu.



Heather M. O'Brien (Revolution Everywhere)

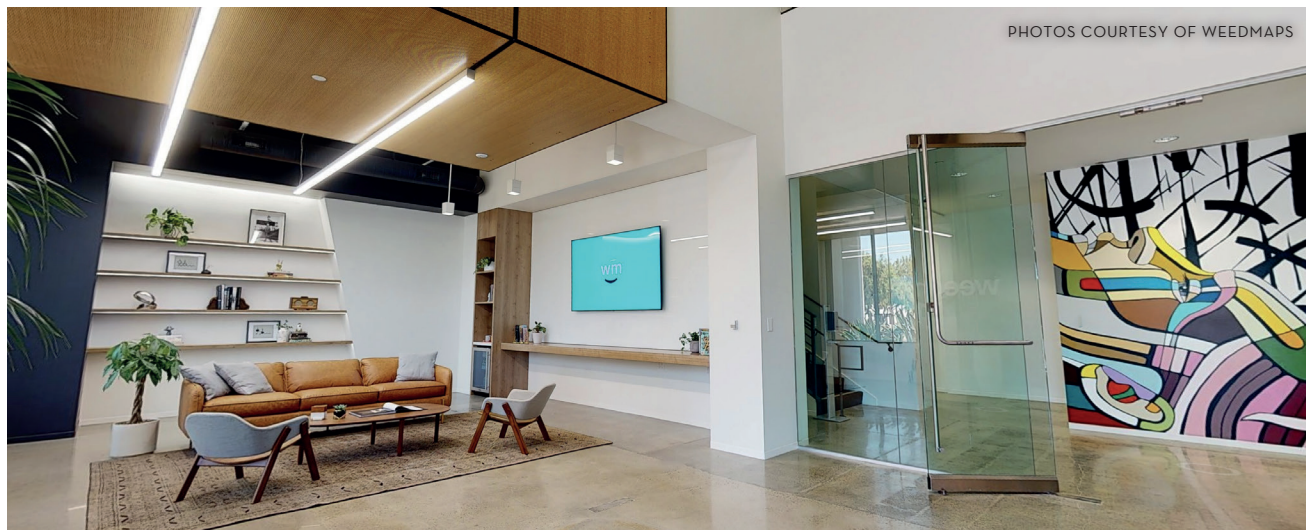
BUSINESS

WEEDMAPS IS CULTIVATING THE FUTURE OF CANNABIS TECHNOLOGY IN IRVINE

IRVINEWEEKLY.COM

DECEMBER 3, 2021 | 10

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WEEDMAPS

Created by a UC Irvine graduate in 2008, Weedmaps has become one of the most recognizable technology companies specializing in the safe access of cannabis in multiple states across the nation.

Since its inception, Weedmaps has evolved, forging relationships with advocacy groups, policymakers, cannabis cultivators and educators, creating a well-rounded niche as a standout resource and viable technology in the cannabis space.

Ironically, however, Weedmaps, which is used primarily as a search engine to locate cannabis dispensaries, delivery services and cannabis products, is headquartered within the cannabis dispensary-free city of Irvine.

Given the fact that Irvine does not have any brick-and-mortar cannabis dispensaries, it may seem like an odd location for a company as deeply entrenched in the cannabis industry.

Juanjo Feijoo, chief operating officer and chief marketing officer at Weedmaps, spoke with *Irvine Weekly* about how a tech company like Weedmaps shakes the “weed company” stigma and what has made Irvine so attractive for so many years.

“I don’t think we think there’s anything wrong with being a cannabis company – we wear that badge with pride,” Fei-

joo explained. “We are both a cannabis company and a technology company, but part of what we’ve done as far as our marketing and advocacy efforts is remove the stigma – I think the way we try to do that is simply by delivering cutting edge technology.”

More importantly, while Weedmaps proudly identifies as a cannabis company, the core of Weedmaps’ functionality is technology. Considering the technology juggernauts currently occupying Irvine – Rivian, Google, Amazon – Feijoo explained that over the years Irvine has become an epicenter of innovation in Orange County, with a deep pool of accessible talent.

“It seems like a great place to attract talent – not only from the local talent pool, but a place that seems very able to

attract talent from other tech hubs,” he said. “Pre-pandemic, we had about 350 people here in Irvine. Obviously, after March of last year, with COVID-19, we went to a very remote focused environment.”

Another part of the core goal at Weedmaps is working to beat the overall negative stigma of cannabis, and is doing so by showcasing technological advancements and state-of-the-art market research.

From the Weedmaps user’s perspective, the app or website can be seen as a digital marketplace that can be searched by term, brand, location – even the type of cannabinoid desired. But from Weedmaps perspective, it has used consumer data to study habits in cannabis consumption for more than a

decade.

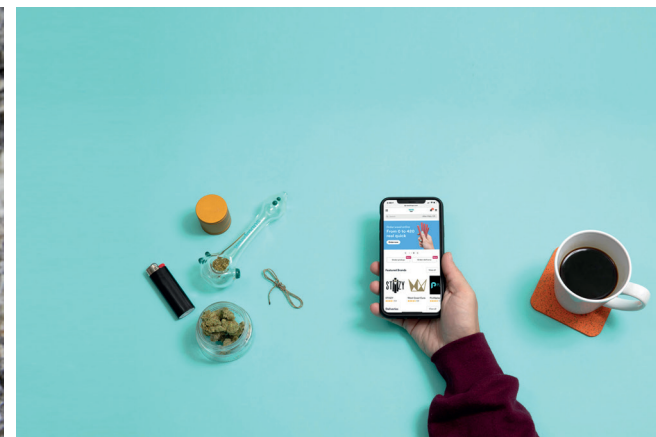
“The technology work that we’ve done over the last 13 years, to capture, manage and make useable our consumer data – we’ve basically been learning about consumer behavior for the last 13 years, and it’s gotten us to a point where we have a very rich and valuable personalization engine, and I think is going to be a definitive mode for us as the company grows,” he said. “It’s very hard, given the lack of consistency of things like brand cataloging in the industry to have normalized data – but it’s one of the things that we’re very proud of from the technology perspective.”

An example of Weedmaps decade-plus of market research in action is the recently released Cannabis In America report. Published in November, the report is the cannabis industry’s first data and insight report that highlights more than a decade of industry trends.

Chris Beals, CEO of Weedmaps, said that the first-ever Cannabis In America report is the product of years of research from the birth of the legal cannabis industry in Colorado a decade ago, with more recent data on how the industry has changed post-Proposition 64 in California.

Beals says he hopes this data will continue bringing more inclusion to the cannabis industry, which may ultimately lead to changes in policy.

“This report highlights attitudes and trends within the industry by providing data and information directly from consumers – an important step as we work towards the goal of building a transparent and inclusive cannabis economy,” Beals said. “Ultimately, this report represents the first steps of Weedmaps beginning to make its unparalleled levels of cannabis industry data available to policy makers, cannabis business holders and industry investors to help them make more informed and accurate decisions.”



BUSINESS



Despite the lack of dispensaries, Feijoo added that Irvine can also be viewed as a strong case study for the proliferation of the cannabis delivery model that so many consumers are utilizing through the Weedmaps infrastructure.

"We're starting to see regulations shift a little bit," he said. "Orange County is a very, very active delivery market, and I think that's part of what's interesting because when they aren't the dispensary, consumers still want to access their medicine. Orange County, as well as Irvine, is one of our most competitive markets."

Still as the cost of operating a cannabis business in California continues to rise, Feijoo admits that legacy operators can be left behind. For some operators – and consumers – the black market continues to offer cheaper opportunities, free of taxes. However, risks can result in both financial and legal consequences.

Through the development of social equity programs like Weedmaps T.E.A.L. (Together, for Equity, Access, and Legalization), along with a dedicated Weedmaps Government Relations team, Weedmaps is also working with local and federal legislators to create a more inclusive industry.

"We set out to create a global and inclusive cannabis marketplace. We truly believe that anyone who wants to be in the industry should be able to be in the industry," he said. "But even on top of that, those that the war on drugs has had an outside negative impact on them or their community, should be given a leg up in the industry."

While the black market still exists, Feijoo said Weedmaps does not view the black market as competition, but said he views the presence of the black market as a barometer for how well the community is responding to regulation.

In fact, he said in some legal cannabis markets, a black market does not exist.

"It entirely depends on how the legal market is regulated," he said. "Oklahoma is the most extreme example of open legalization – Oklahoma has more active dispensaries than California, despite having a fraction of the population and that's because they've taken a very open approach to licensing. They essentially don't have a black market in the state, there is some struggle with cross border, particularly with Texas."

As the legal cannabis industry continues to grow long term, Feijoo said he already sees a "deep acceleration" toward a global "de-stigmatization" and acceptance of cannabis legalization happening around the world.

"In the last few months alone, Germany, South Africa, Spain, Luxembourg, have all introduced bills to legalize in some way. They're probably six to 10 years behind where the U.S. is – but they'll catch up," he said. "The de-stigmatization will become more global and with that will come new more avenues for how you actually build this industry."

Looking ahead, Feijoo said does not expect legalization to hamper regulation, and envisions the cannabis industry aligning with more mainstream industries.

"Cannabis is never not going to be regulated, I don't think anybody expects cannabis is going to be sold like lettuce. It will probably be regulated akin to alcohol or pharmaceuticals," he said. "With that, I think you'll start to see much more strength in brands – but for the most part consumers don't have strong brand affinity, and I think that's going to change over the next few years."

When asked if people will be watching cannabis companies advertise on television within the next decade, Feijoo opted for a rare one word answer, adding that 10 years may be too long.

"Yes," he said. "I think we'll see it much sooner than 10 years from now."

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MUSIC

IV4 PUT A SPELL ON YOU

VOCALIST AND ENTREPRENEUR IV4 TALKS MUSIC AND VOODOO.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

SoCal-based artist IV4 has been singing for her entire life. In fact, she says, she practically came out of the womb singing and performing. She's laughing, but super-serious when she describes her passion for her music.

"I've always found ways to stay dedicated," she says. "My mother definitely supported that, working three jobs, making sure I could take pianist lessons and dance lessons every now and then. I moved myself out to New York, with a few hundred dollars in my pocket, and I started recording myself. Then I found a team in L.A. I guess the moment I realized it was all really happening is when I moved myself to New York and then L.A., and then

I'm out here talking to the Weeknd, who reached out to me first to say that he loves my music and wants to sign me."

Yep, a lot happened there. Ultimately though, she bounced between the nation's two entertainment hubs before the Weeknd discovered her.

"I'm broke as broke can be, living on a couch, making music that I'm thinking only I enjoy, and I've got people that are in this game for 10 years-plus telling me that they appreciate the music that I'm bringing," she says. "So that was a wake-up call. Labels reaching out to me, and they've got artists on their roster that are 10-plus years in. I guess I see myself as an equal there. That settled it for me."

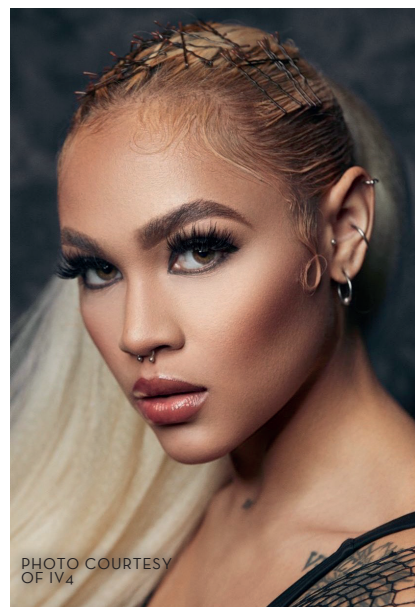


PHOTO COURTESY OF IV4

IV4 describes her sound as "alternative contemporary" – a sweet contradiction that makes sense to her. Very "of the times," but unafraid to throw a curveball. That makes sense when listening to the latest "Stroke" single and the forthcoming *Get Rich and Cry Trying* project.

"I feel like the title is pretty much where my head's at – get rich and cry trying," IV4 says. "It's just about the music that I was making, and the music I've been making that I feel like relates to the moods that I've been in. The different ways that I've had to hustle and explore different versions of myself to find who is IV. It's been an emotional rollercoaster – it's been a long three-year ride since I got out here to L.A. I'm still kicking ass and taking names. We're slowly elevating up, it's just a journey but it's a whole lot of fun and we're doing it."

IV4 has also done some modeling, but now she's focused on her music and her two businesses. For starters, she has a company called Naked Voodoo.

"I believe I started Naked Voodoo back in 2020, but it wasn't really a cultivated idea," she says. "I was making voodoo dolls for myself, and I posted one. I was making them for friends and people started wanting them more and more. COVID hit, and I sunk into that business. I have to make money somewhere else – I can't be out touring. And it kind of took off."

While the products are undeniably fun, it's not a kitschy thing – voodoo is a part of IV's culture.

"My family is West African and Haitian," she says. "It's something that is passed down, and then my mother is pagan and wiccan. She practices those as well. They're very earthy people. I always thought it was something I'd never get to share with anyone. There are a lot of

people who are eager to learn, and I'm happy to share with them."

Her other business is a clothing line provocatively called IEatBoys.

"That is my passion project right now," she says. "I've been wanting to start a clothing line for a while. I've had so many samples of different things in my closet, waiting in the plastic. I still have so many things I want to drop, and I'm excited with the project. That started 6-8 months ago. It was time. When I was younger, I didn't have money to buy a bunch of new clothes, so my mom would take me to Goodwill or I would get hand-me-downs from my family, or maybe go to a yard sale, and I would hand sew them together. My first drop was just bikinis, t-shirts, lighter cases and that was it. Just to see if there was going to be a fan base for this, if people would react to it. And they did, so I'm excited to start dropping sets and actual jackets, pants and all kinds of things. Making it unisex, and inclusive with all sizes."

IV says that there are challenges for a woman in business in 2021, but perks too. Notably, she says that she's underestimated in this male-dominated world and, while she shouldn't have to, she says that she makes it work for her.

"A lot of people see someone young, a woman, and being a person of color too it's difficult sometimes because it's a male-dominated industry in fashion and music," she says. "Sales in general. I've walked in places with my friends who don't do any of the things that I do, and people are eager to shake their hand thinking 'this is the reason you're here,' and I've been completely ignored. But the underestimation is also key. It makes you work harder, push harder – all the women and people of color I know work twice, three times as hard to get to the same position as someone not in that predicament would be. It makes me go harder, and it makes me a stronger person because I'm learning how to overcome these obstacles."

Looking ahead, there's plenty to look forward to from all of IV4's endeavors.

"For IEatBoys we're going to do a massive drop," she says. "I'm going to try to partner with some people. I don't want to say anything until it's final. For Naked Voodoo, I'm expanding the business. We're getting the website up. We're getting features and publicity on that. I'm excited to keep promoting and pushing that. With the music, I'm dropping my project at the top of the year. I've got some cool features, amazing visuals coming out, and some really cool collaborations."

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ENTERTAINMENT

HOUSE OF GUCCI: RIDLEY SCOTT'S FASHION FAUX PAS

BY CHAD BYRNES



If you've seen the previews for Ridley Scott's *House of Gucci* and caught wind of the caricatured Italian accents, 80's soundtrack and star-studded cast, you might expect a campy romp or a satirical take on one of the most outrageous family dynasties in modern history. Instead, the film goes for more of a contemplative affair, and sadly, it doesn't work with the narrative, which switches from serious to absurd like a model changing clothes at a runway show.

Don't worry, the movie still has plenty of wackiness, but it's precipitated by the characters themselves, not the director forcing it on us. Stylistically, Scott prefers to watch the drama unfold with an observer's curiosity, instead of jumping into the muck with his players (unless he's directing a period piece like *Gladiator* or more recently *The Last Duel*, wherein he splatters mud all over the place). Although this somewhat controlled approach to a saga about betrayal, sex and murder has a dash of elegance, the

film feels uneven and white-knuckled. Besides the obvious flaws (like the silly accents and overacting), the script and directing desperately needed another layer of depth and psychological intrigue. *Gucci* is too polite to be campy and not campy enough to be farcical. This house needed some refurbishing.

Based on Sara Gay Forden's book, *The House of Gucci: The Sensational Story of Murder, Madness, Glamour and Greed*, Lady Gaga plays Patrizia Reggiani, a party girl working for her father's trucking company in Rome. One night she meets the awkward and coy Maurizio Gucci (Adam Driver) at a nightclub. Although Maurizio hails from the infamous Gucci clan who made a fortune with their eponymous luxury brand, he's disdainful of his family and opts to study law instead. The true power of the Gucci line lies in the hands of Maurizio's father, Rodolfo (Jeremy Irons) and uncle, Aldo (Al Pacino), not with their brethren.

After Patrizia and Maurizio fall in love and get married, Rodolfo cuts off his son

for marrying someone beneath his station. This doesn't stop Patrizia however, who desperately wants to become a part of this opulent family. With some subtle maneuvering, she positions her husband to take over the empire. Patrizia is not presented as a typical gold-digger or Lady Macbeth – she's a businesswoman who recognizes that Gucci's antiquated approach and laziness will eventually destroy the brand's legacy. With her help, Maurizio eventually takes over the business creating a deep fissure between family members, including Paolo (Jared Leto), his errant, talentless cousin who considers himself the real designer of the family. What ensues is a tragicomedy that needed both more tragedy and more comedy.

Even as the movie struggles along, at times feeling like a mere chronicle of events, the actors do their best with their thinly conceived characters. With her bob of jet-black hair, chic silk dresses and sultry gaze, Gaga's turn as Patrizia should cement her place as a formi-

dable actress beyond *A Star Is Born*. Although there's been an influx of criticism regarding her accent (apparently she comes off more Eastern European than Italian) Gaga doesn't sound any more caricatured than her experienced cohorts. Undoubtedly, the rest of the cast is fascinating to watch, regardless.

As the patriarch, Pacino plays a man who might act like a generous grandfather on the surface, but harbors a lot of hate. Selma Hayek provides comic relief as Patrizia's confidant. And the always dependable Driver gives a textured and believable performance. Leto, on the other hand, is anything but. Unrecognizable in a fat suit and prosthetic hairline, Leto wails, blubbers and flails about like a token "Italian" character from an '80's sitcom. Although his turn as Paolo is beyond ludicrous, he actually breathes life into a movie that's way too sedate. He's probably the only one who thought he was starring in a straight-up farce.

There are some good moments in *Gucci*, and Scott's mastery for detail is on full display. The production design, costumes and music sweep you up when you need them most. And the story is undeniably juicy. But the pinballing between parody and reality never seems sure where to land. At times, you wish Martin Scorsese would swoop in, rev the engine and meld the two together. The script by Becky Johnston and Roberto Bentivegna has all the components of a solid drama, but it lacks the subversiveness and brutality required of an emotional family saga. It's a classic case of too much exposition and not enough vitality. This is apparent in how the script doesn't flesh out the personalities or their motives. Like, why does Maurizio go from reluctant and bookish to ruthless CEO, seemingly overnight? They never tell us.

Even with its faux pas and odd choices, *Gucci* does have some sizzle. Scott manages to immerse us in a strange, self-contained world that's as messy as it is cold. Perhaps that's deliberate on his part; it's difficult to tell. Although he started in advertising and two of his early films redefined slickness (*Alien*, *Blade Runner*), at 83-years-old, the director has evolved into a master of disciplined filmmaking. And he's got a great eye. Still, if your subject is as dramatic and bonkers as the Gucci's, it would be better to add some flair to your approach and not hold back. The result is like watching two strangers argue over a car wreck – it's entertaining, but pretty uncomfortable.

ENTERTAINMENT

TICK TICK... BOOM!

LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA'S DIRECTORIAL DEBUT HONORS MUSICAL LIFE

BY ASHER LUBERTO

Lin-Manuel Miranda's directorial debut, *Tick, Tick... Boom!* should cement his name as a director. After his Broadway show *Hamilton*, Miranda burst onto the screen with a musical ode to his hometown, *In the Heights*. Set in the Manhattan neighborhood of Washington Heights, the exuberant film established the multifaceted artist as a writer/actor/musician whose blend of hip hop and Salsa wasn't just must-see cinema, but must-hear.

Stepping behind the camera for the first time, Miranda is the perfect choice

to adapt Jonathan Larson's *Tick, Tick... Boom!* and he combines his experience and skill staging dance, music, action and romance to liberate the story from the stage, adding color without losing autobiographical appeal.

It's five years before Larson (Andrew Garfield) composes *Rent*, the show that inspired *In the Heights* and took Broadway by storm. He's in the middle of his first musical, *Superbia*, which he's been working on for eight years. Also around the corner is his 30th birthday, and he's beginning to lament not being on the same track as his hero Stephen Sondheim, who wrote *West Side Story* at age 27.

He wants to be Sondheim 2.0, but he gets sidetracked by all the things going on in his life. The diner where he works is stressing him out, as is the move with his girlfriend, Susan (Alexandra Shipp), pressure from his parents, Nanette and Allan (Sheila Tapia and Joel Gray), and the virus that infects his best friend and confidante, Michael (Robin de Jesus). The movie is essentially a collection of vignettes from Larson's life; each moment inspiring a song that will show up in his next play.

Written by Steven Levenson (*Fosse/*



Verdon, Dear Evan Hansen), this is a serious story about art, creativity and sacrifice disguised as a catchy musical. Larson goes through the same motions anyone who dives headfirst into an artform must go through, from the fear of rejection to the want of acceptance, from the joy of positive feedback to the grit of working everyday for little money. And yet there's honor in pursuing art, a concept this movie captures mellifluously.

Everything in the film sings: the music, the characters, the performers, the production design. It's all in perfect harmony. There are a few too many reaction shots (Sondheim's reaction to *Superbia* borders on parody), but the movie checks off every box on the musical checklist.

The songs? Great, of course. The story? Also great. The performances? Look at the cast! Everyone on screen is lovely, especially the earnest, dedicated Garfield, in a blissfully confident turn. *Tick, Tick... Boom!* is so perfectly executed that it's impossible not to like. It feels like the film Miranda was born to make, and as Larson and Sondheim did before him, he's created something that will outlive us all.

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